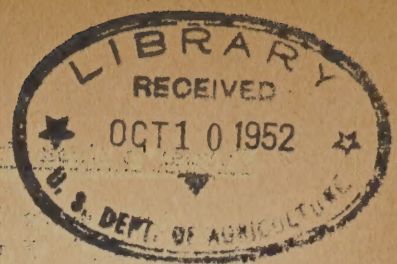


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INFORMATION OPPORTUNITIES IN FARM AND HOME WEEK*

By Earl C. Richardson,
Extension Editor, Michigan State College

If you got up early this morning thinking you were going to learn a lot of new information on this subject, I'm sorry and beg forgiveness. But those of you who have come into agricultural college information work in the past 5 or 10 years--as I have--may find that some of the "old" information ideas, like an old pair of shoes, sure feel good at times; especially when they fit.

I am convinced that information ideas, like a lot of our jokes, are never very new, but just a new twist on an old gag. I think we are going to find that true even with the newest of our media-- television. We will go back and draw on more and more of the fundamental information techniques, the more television expands and the more we utilize it.

While on the subject of the old and the new, I would like to quote from a letter I received recently. I asked an old-timer in this business to describe what normal times in the agricultural information profession are like. The answer:

"You ask for an old-timer to describe to you what 'normal times' were like. I have been in this business only 35 years, yet I can't qualify as an old-timer, at least to the extent of giving you an accurate description of 'normal times.' There was World War I which took me for 2 years; then there were a succession of flood disasters, and agricultural depressions; the great invasion of the corn borer which we tried to stem by spending \$10,000,000; the Farm Board; and then the advent of crop control and the action programs, World War II, and so on and on.

"As long as I can remember there was no period when the information man wasn't at his wit's end. I guess you'll have to go back to the mauve decade and good old moustache-cup days. As a matter of fact, Earl, the country has been experiencing growing pains ever since World War I and the abnormal is now the 'normal.' I have gotten over the belief that 'if we lick this problem, we're in the clear.' We will be saddled with emergencies during all our lifetime, and the leisurely days when one can acquire some culture are for a distant future."

I am sure that those words--penned by our graying old warrior and chief, Les Schlup, from that haven of organized confusion on the Potomac--will convince you, as they did me, that things have always been this way in our chosen profession.

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Farmer's Week Techniques Useful for Other Events

But on to the subject of "Information Opportunities in Farm and Home Week." I will not confine my remarks to that particular kind of an event only, for through a survey I have learned that many States no longer hold Farm and Home Weeks. But I am sure some of the techniques used profitably in dealing with information at such events can be fully applied as well to short course events; traveling exhibits; conferences; field days; demonstrations; or any event designed to appeal to great sections of the public. These events give us an opportunity to put considerable emphasis on information.

Not only can we make wide use of the press and radio in connection with these events; they also offer us excellent opportunities for letting people know what publications we have to offer. They give us ways to make effective use of modern exhibits, to show movies, and to utilize other visual materials. And we are now already in a period where television is an important medium for advance publicity, and spot information coverage of such events.

Farmer's Week a Cooperative Project

First, I want to tell you a little about our annual Farmers' Week at Michigan State College, and how we endeavor to make use of the information opportunities it offers. Then I will summarize some ideas received in a questionnaire sent to other States.

But since some of our attendance figures are always subject to question, I must tell this story about the parents who were quite disturbed concerning their son who was always exaggerating. They took him to a doctor, and then a psychologist, and finally a psychiatrist. They found that the young lad simply couldn't tell the truth. One of the doctors recommended to the family they move from Michigan . . . that would be the only hope for the young lad growing up to be a normal person. Quite astounded by the idea, the father asked: "Where should we move?" The doctor replied: "Either to California where he will not be noticed or to Texas where he will be appreciated."

The thing that makes our Farmers' Week event a real information opportunity is the fact that it is a cooperative project--not just extension, and not even just agriculture. It's an event in which everyone pitches in and has a part. We do not claim that our information alone is what gets the crowd, but we do know it helps. We would just as soon admit that the crowd helps get more of our information used in the press and radio--because the press and radio in our State realize the event is important in the minds of a great many people.

Our total crowd for the week averages from 30,000 to 40,000 people, with as many as 15,000 visitors on the campus for the one big day--the last Thursday of January. Seventy-five percent of our attendance is made up of people who come in only for 1 day, and return home that night. A very limited number stay out the week; a few stay over for the 2 or 3 days.

East Lansing is located within 125 miles of 80 percent of the principal agricultural areas of Michigan, so that fact makes driving in and back home the same day not too difficult.

Information Build-Up Begins Six Weeks Ahead

We start our advance publicity in mid-December, 6 weeks ahead of the event. We try to have new information in each service--weekly, daily, and radio--up to the week before. We hold back certain features so we can always have a new lead. The week before the event we endeavor to get more than one news story used by the papers, and the radio stations are very good about using several short announcements.

Preliminary programs are printed and ready for mailing by January 1, and they go to about 30,000 people. About the same time, the county agricultural agents receive posters and window cards--which they place in banks, grain elevators, and other places farm families frequent. The State farm paper, the Michigan Farmer, always cooperates by running many special features, the program in brief, and similar helpful advance publicity.

Our office likewise prepares all the copy--about 45 galleys of type--for a 24- to 32-page tabloid supplement of the Lansing State Journal, the daily which circulates heavily in the counties nearest the college. We offer the radio stations, through the county agricultural agents, some brief spot interviews on what the different departments plan for their programs. The interviews are taped and sent to those requesting the service.

That, in brief, is our advance coverage--other than special arrangements provided for our larger radio stations, and everything used by our college radio station.

Coverage During Michigan Farmer's Week

Advance publicity is important--but the real opportunity for information comes when our Farmers' Week is actually in progress. We ask the different speakers for quotations or excerpts from their talks. (We find we get better response than if we ask them for the entire talk.) From those we prepare advances, for release at the hour and day the talks are given. In addition we prepare about 25 or more "spot news" releases during the week, including the results of feeding contests, seed and potato show winners, elections of officers of State associations, and news on similar events.

We set up a press room in our office. Packets are made up for each press and radio person attending. Another set of envelopes is prepared for those who are not attending, but who have requested a complete file of the material. Last year 18 newspapers and radio stations in Michigan staffed our Farmers' Week. In addition, several national and regional farm publications had representatives there for all or part of the week.

We helped the radio people by arranging the various interviews wanted, and provided reserved rooms for recording. A few of our county agricultural agents, who go on the air regularly at home, even brought in their own recorders to pick up programs to be used in weeks to follow.

Our visual aids section works into the Farmers' Week set-up in several ways. We send from 50 to 75 photographs direct to "home town" newspapers, or make 8 by 10 glossy prints available to press visitors. We have been able to provide 4-hour service on news photos through complete cooperation of the staff. During the week many educational movies are shown--including some we have produced ourselves. (It continually surprises us how many people come to an auditorium to view educational films while resting their weary feet.) Of course our visual aids section offers help to departments on the preparation of exhibits, which continue to show improvement each year.

Many of the subject-matter departments make use of bulletin boards, to exhibit copies of specific bulletins and folders available, with directions for ordering. Our bulletin distribution office has one of its biggest weeks of the whole year at this time. For weeks following, orders come in for educational material. Departments are not permitted to hand out the regular printed bulletins because of possible waste. However, some mimeographed material, prepared by the departments, is distributed on the hand-out basis.

Making Citizens Feel That the College Is Their Own

Certainly Farmers' Week is a lot of work for everyone. All of us in the information office give it some time--some of us more than others. But it is one of the events which make Michigan citizens feel that the college actually does belong to them. We think that's good.

The same is true of our State 4-H Club Show, held the last week of August on the Michigan State College campus. It's actually a State 4-H Club "fair," with more livestock exhibited than at the real State Fair in Detroit the following week. Our administration understandably feels that the more of our people who come to Michigan State College and feel at home there, making use of our dormitories and other facilities, the more the citizens of Michigan will come to feel that it is "their college."

Information Opportunities Found in Special Events

Now to pick up some ideas on what other States have done to make real information opportunities out of big events like Farm and Home Week.

Early this month the University of Wisconsin had a Farm Field Day. Bry Kearl's gang put out a packet of valuable information--part of it to be released in advance, and the remainder follow-up information on what took place. It was the type of information that could be used any time, with little alteration.

Vermont stresses its Town and Country Days as a chance for all Vermonters to get acquainted with the educational and recreational facilities of their State university.

Delaware, like certain other States, provides a luncheon for the press and radio people on the opening day of their Farm and Home Week. At the luncheon they are acquainted with material available. This State also cooperates with the camera crew from a commercial television station in filming high lights of the event for a newsreel.

New York, Illinois, Wyoming, and Kansas all still follow the tradition of a regular Farm and Home Week, too. Each of them has an information practice or two worth individual mention, and passing on here.

Cornell features a well-staffed and well-stocked newsroom, with typists and telegraph service available, and a special darkroom for photographers. This makes it easier for the working press to operate during Farm and Home Week.

Illinois has worked out an effective release schedule with the press associations, which makes it possible to get good spot coverage to all the daily papers of the State.

Wyoming concentrated on spot news coverage by photographs this past year, and it proved highly successful.

Kansas arranges a number of press-radio conferences, where outstanding speakers and officials may be interviewed. Facilities are made available for tape recordings following the press conference.

Just recently, Oregon used many of these techniques in providing coverage of its Agricultural Conference. This is an important farmer and homemaker group assembled on the campus to advise the State college on policies and programs.

Missouri makes use of short tape recordings from deans, directors, and others in connection with its annual Farm Forum.

Oklahoma made use of television for its Farm and Home Conference this year, putting a news reel type show on film; it was used by both the Tulsa and Oklahoma City television stations.

Minnesota uses its Farm and Home Week more as a public relations tool to interpret research to the people.

Iowa State has abandoned its Farm and Home Week. Instead, Iowa has about 35 special field days at different times during the year. Information staff members are members of the field day committees, making possible good information planning.

Louisiana leans heavily on the good relations the field agents have with their local press and radio outlets--and releases much information through local representatives.

Wisconsin is blessed with the problem of the press and radio giving too much coverage of Farm and Home Week. Like the girl who got a "lot of loving on Saturday night but none throughout the week" this State would prefer that the press and radio spread its attention throughout the year.

So much for a summary on what's being done in some of the States to make use of such information opportunities. Now, let's take a quick look at one of the specific problems all of us here face--and if you do not face it in your State you are fortunate.

Telling the Farmer's Story to the Consumer

Those of you in the highly agricultural States may think you have no problem concerning consumer acceptance of the farmer and his product--but you have. This pitting of nation against nation, party against party, race against race, labor against capital, and one pressure group against another is spreading. Bitterness is even entering into the thoughts certain individuals have towards people in a different job, vocation, profession, or way of life. There is no question that the misinformed consumer--who is nearly always fair-minded when he is informed--places the blame for high food prices almost entirely on the producer. We are all going to find ourselves, from here on, engaged more and more with telling the farmers' story to the consumer.

In a polite way we must get to our urban readers, listeners, and television viewers with more facts on the farmers' share of the consumers' dollar. That means putting out more economic information--information which is accurate, clearly stated, and unbiased--to show the fair-minded consumer that the dent in his pocketbook hasn't necessarily meant any bulge in the farmer's wallet. More than that, it means presenting the facts in a manner to invite acceptance by the media we deal with. Those "general over-all outlooks" certainly have a place, but statistics which must deal in "millions" of everything from dollars, tons, and acres to man-hours and board-feet can get to be just so much confetti--both to the news editors and the urban homemaker. They have to divide an "estimated national income" by 160,000,000 to understand why it isn't really true that she's buying food out of what she thought was the family clothing' budget.

Permit me to give an example.

The Farmer's Share in the Cost of Food

Recently a press association dispatch came out of Washington--not that that's unusual in itself. This one concerned Price Administrator Arnall stopping to get a quart of milk to take home. He was supposedly astounded that he couldn't buy it for a dime. We had just completed some studies in Michigan to show that the farmer got 9.9 cents from the 22-cent quart of milk sold in Detroit. So to our press and radio outlets--primarily in the urban centers--we pitched a story on the approach that Mr. Arnall's "dime" would only pay the farmers' share of the cost of a

quart of milk. The approach seemed to hit the fancy of editors and radio commentators who gave it a good play.

We think it helped. At least it got the problem--stated in understandable terms of one farmer, one consumer, and one quart of milk, but still stated accurately and fairly--to many people who had no means, nor time, to figure out that more than half of their 22 cents was never even seen by the farmer who owned the cows. More important here, we were able to present the information so as to invite its acceptance as general news by the urban press and radio--as well as by the farm editors.

We noted in our survey that Ohio State is endeavoring to bring out what farm production means to city people in its Farm and Home Week releases to daily papers and radio stations. In Michigan, where industry also overshadows agriculture, we are using the same approach.

We are gradually getting cooperation from our metropolitan press and radio in this program. One of the Detroit newspapers staffs our events with a feature writer who writes from the consumer point of view. He also gets pictures with the same appeal. We like it, and some of our down-to-earth farm leaders in the State have mentioned that they think it is helpful to farm people.

With our farm and rural population becoming smaller and our industrial centers becoming larger, more and more States will be met with this problem of consumer acceptance of the farmers' problems. It is one which all of you face, and only time will tell when it becomes a dominating factor in your work. It is already becoming so with the rest of us.

